New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1949

Volume X, Number 16 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of May 30, 1949

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1949 PRODUCTIONS

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There are no new theatre openings scheduled in New York during June. Next scheduled theatre opening is July 7th; issue containing reviews will be mailed, as usual, the following week.

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NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK SUN

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"Mr. Adam"

New York World-Telegram

MAY 26, 1949

'Mr. Adam' Brings His Wares to Royal

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The most noteworthy thing about "Mr. Adam" is that given its central situation it can remain so consistently unfunny.

It is the story of the one man in the world who fails to be made impotent by the explosion of an atomic material factory. Naturally he is a center of international attraction, and his life and well-being are taken over by the government and guarded by the Army.

Meets Hot Opposition.

The play devotes most of its time to the ethical question of whether it is not wisest for Adam to maintain only a platonic relationship with his wife while he is employed by science to repopulate the earth. Mr. Adam and his wife each goes through moments of making the great sacrifice to mankind, and the plot's climax is reached when he agrees to world-wide studship only on condition that boundaries, dictators, armies and wars be wiped out.

This naturally means the end of the careers of the men most active in exploiting him, and is met with some hot opposition.

As must inevitably be true with a plot like this, there is only one method of solving it, which is the discovery that the premise was not literally true after all.

Two Schools of Thought.

There is a good deal of embarrassing conversation on the stage, when the dialogue grows either frank, vulgar or sly. Even this, under the circumstances, might not have been particularly objectionable if there had been any real humor employed in the play's construction.

When it is not being painfully obvious it is abysmally dull.

The cast falls into two schools of thought. One group tries to play like comedians. The other believes that just being up there on the stage with so many humorless lines to say is a funny enough plight in itself.

In the latter group, Howard Freeman as a brainless colonel and Frank Albertson as a heckling newspaperman seem happiest in their methods. James Dobson does his best with the dully noble role of Mr. Adam, and Elisabeth Fraser can do little more than sound exasperating as his Southern cutie of a wife.

Emory Parnell fights the conventionally verbose role of the government head of a Refertilization Project, while Maxine Semon and Oliver Blake can only look silly instead of amusing as a pair of frightening characters who prove Adam is not the only one.

"MR. ADAM"

A comedy by Jack Kirkland, based on the novel by Pat Frank; staged by Mr. Kirkland; setting by Phil Raiguel; presented by Mr. Kirkland at the Royale Theatre, May 25, 1949. The cast:

Mary Ellen Adam..... Elisabeth Fraser
Mrs. Brundage..... Effie Laird
Homer Adam.... James Dobson
Steve Smith.... Frank Albertson
Joe..... George Ramsey
Colonel Phelps-Smythe.... Howard Freeman
Sgt. Carlson..... John James
Sgt. Donetti..... Robert Gray
Nate Gabelman..... Ted Thorpe
Percy Klutz..... Emory Parnell
Jane Zitter..... Maxine Semon
Obadiah Latch..... Oliver Blake

Synopsis: The action of the play takes place in the living room of the home of Homer Adam, on the outskirts of Tarrytown, N. Y. Time: The present.

DAILY NEWS

MAY 26, 1949

'Mr. Adam' Is Last Man in World And Season's Last Play—Goody!

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Except for a bit of a stiff neck this morning, I guess I had a pretty good sleep last evening at the Royale Theatre. I feel all right. But I did have a dream, so just be quiet now and let me tell you about it.

I dreamed—or is it drempt?—that, with two exceptions, all of the creative geniuses of the world had been wiped out or made sterile. All of Shakespeare's works had vanished, and da Vinci's, and Beethoven's. Maxwell Anderson was under guard in a nuthouse and Arthur Miller was earning a small living wearing a straitjacket in the Olsen & Johnson show. Nobody was accomplishing nothing except for these two guys I dreamed about.

One of them was named Pat Frank, who had written a two-bit novel titled "Mr. Adam." The other was a theatrical producer and playwright named Jack Kirkland. In one of those strange twists that dreams have, these two had mated and had foaled a play, also titled "Mr. Adam," and the thing had been produced at the Royale, where I was sleeping last night.

"Must See."

Since it was the last work of art in the world, everybody had to go see it. There was a law about it. If you didn't go, you got shot by the authorities. Most people preferred suicide, but the ones who lacked the moral strength to destroy themselves went to see "Mr. Adam."

They saw a play about a boy named Homer Adam who happened to be down in a lead mine when a large, economy size atom bomb went off and sterilized every other person of masculine gender in the world. This explosion seemed only to have sharpened the creative urge of all the world's females, so Mr. Adam became what the society columns would call "a catch."

World Crisis Indeed.

The slave audiences who were afraid to take the easy way out and went to see the play saw James Dobson, wearing a tumbledown shock of hair, in the role of Mr. Adam, a young husband who was frankly appalled at the job Mr. Frank and Mr. Kirkland had cut out for him. They also saw Elisabeth Fraser, wearing a southern accent and a bosom which I doubt was home-grown, in the role of Mr. Adam's possessive young wife. And they heard some quite dreadful attempts at comedy lines.

In the play Mr. Adam was supposed to repopulate the world all by himself. And in my dream Mr. Frank and Mr. Kirkland were to recreate all the art in the world, all by themselves. But you know how it is with dreams. Soon as you wake up you are all right, even though you've just had the hell scared out of you. I'm okay now.

Daily Mirror

MAY 26, 1949

'Mr. Adam'—with A-Plot—Gets B for Boring

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Jack Kirkland bored the blazes out of some first-nighters at the Royale Theatre last evening with "Mr. Adam," a burlesque on Pat Frank's satirical novel of that title. In addition to being the producer, Kirkland also is billed as dramatist and director. The only prizes he is likely to win on these scores are boobies.

"Mr. Adam" has to do with an atomic explosion that makes fatherhood impossible for all of the males in the world but one meek little engineer living happily with his wife in Tarrytown. The engineer, in spite of himself, becomes an international asset and indispensable pawn of bureaucrats.

Since he is compelled to sacrifice his family life for the world's welfare, he determines to exact some sensible concessions from those who would exploit him. He demands that wars be ended, taxation be lifted, etc. In the end, we think he is permitted to return to his wife. It was difficult to be certain because of the farcical competition given the main theme.

There probably is a satire in the Frank novel, but Kirkland has chosen to do his play in terms of revue hokum. What point there was in the beginning has been lost in caricature and double-entendre. The end product is a dull and interminable smoking-car joke.

Elisabeth Fraser and James Dobson labored valiantly on behalf of the unfortunate Tarrytowners caught in the clutches of the governmental zanies. Frank Albertson got all that anyone could from the role of a sympathetic newspaper reporter. Frank, praise be, consistently refused to grab any of the slapsticks flying aimlessly about stage.

Howard Freeman, Emory Parnell, Maxine Semon and Oliver Blake were forced into orgies of tasteless antics. They won your admiration by their courage under fire.

"Mr. Adam," by the watch, is a relatively brief misdemeanor. But from out front it seems an endless torture. The evils of this world are attributed to Eve's having listened to that serpent in the Garden of Eden. Oh, why did she have to bite that apple and eventually unleash "Mr. Adam" on us?

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

MAY 26, 1949

By HOWARD BARNES

A Dismal Postscript

JACK KIRKLAND has added a dismal and tasteless postscript to the season at the Royale. His adaptation of Pat Frank's novel, "Mr. Adam," is a grab-bag of ancient wheezes, random pandemonium and innuendo. The title character, as you doubtless know, is the last surviving man of virility in the world, after an atom bomb holocaust. It is his personal predicament, as various governmental departments attempt to take him over, which is the basis of a so-called satirical comedy. Even that original Frank theme is lost in a welter of bad theater.

• • •

For some unaccountable reason Kirkland has brought his production to Broadway all the way from San Francisco, after a ten-week tour. Perhaps he thought the show was bawdy enough to catch audiences off-guard at a time of closings, rather than openings. The fact is that the variations on an ancient subject for jest are not even funny enough to entertain a smoking car. Meanwhile, the jibes at Washington bureaucracy are neither pointed nor original. "Mr. Adam" veers listlessly between double-entendre and dull burlesque, getting one honest laugh out of a press relations colonel who forgets how to issue the order "about face."

• • •

Pity the players in this belated and abysmal charade. James Dobson plays the distracted hero with lugubrious emphasis, but he hasn't a chance, even when he tries idealistically to trade his precious manhood for wholesale world reforms. Elisabeth Fraser is alternately coy and petulant as Mrs. Adam, while Howard Freeman and Emory Parnell chew the scenery in the parts of the chief political big-wheels. Alone of the company, Frank Albertson succeeds occasionally in creating an illusion that "Mr. Adam" is satirical, comic, or makes any stage sense at all. Certainly the Kirkland direction is as aimless and witless as his translation. Here, indeed, is a sorry full stop for theatrical activity.

The Sun

MAY 26, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE

Bottom of the Barrel.

A little atrocity called "Mr. Adam," the season's final play, put in quite a claim last night to being its very worst. Jack Kirkland, author of "Tobacco Road," wrote, directed and produced the new piece, and somebody slipped it into the Royale Theater when the Shuberts weren't looking.

Banal and tasteless and offensive, with no humor at all and some fairly dreadful performances, "Mr. Adam" reveals the professional theater in a woeful state. The New York stage can seem pretty wonderful when it turns out a "South Pacific" or a "Death of a Salesman" and it is so outrageous and futile when it comes through with such an exhibit as "Mr. Adam." It's time for a look at the calendar—and to hope for a bright September.

Kirkland's comedy, based on a novel by Pat Frank, is about the plight faced by the human race when atomic explosions leave but one non-sterile male on the planet. There are then a lot of high-powered goings-on about efforts to draft young Mr. Homer Adam of Tarrytown, N. Y., into a re-fertilization project.

James Dobson is rather lost as the remaining male left with the powers of procreation. Elisabeth Fraser is vexingly coy as his good-looking and quite human young wife. Most of the others of the cast yowl their way through the two acts as they scramble about the stage.

"Mr. Adam" comes to us from Chicago. Let's have no more protests from Cook county about rubbish that Broadway sends its way.

Saturday night for "Mr. Adam." Or sooner.